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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR HOSTS IFTAR DINNER

¶1. Summary. Over 100 Muslim youth, religious leaders, and high ranking government officials attended the Ambassador's Iftar dinner on September 27. A poster display of USG projects in Mindanao and festive fabric loaned by a Muslim attendee were well received. Many guests traveled from Mindanao for the event. Hosting them in Manila, in addition to our frequent interactions in Mindanao, cemented relationships with the Ambassador and Country Team. End Summary.

Muslim Internship Program

¶2. Among Iftar guests were over 30 Muslim young professionals from Mindanao, who were in Manila as part of USAID-sponsored Congressional Internship Program for Young Muslim Leaders (CIPYML). Participants enthusiastically shared stories of their work on legislation and policy formation at the House of Representatives. Several interns said the work has broadened their understanding of national issues, governance processes, and the country's democratic values.

Government Officials and Religious Leaders

¶3. The Ambassador and other Embassy officials' frequent trips to Mindanao were a topic of conversation amongst guests. Prominent Muslim leaders from Mindanao noted that the visits were a clear sign to the communities that the USG pays attention and cares about what happens in Mindanao. Others mentioned that it is important to encourage both peace and prosperity in the ARMM. Datu Paglas, a highly successful plantation operator in Central Mindanao with a long history of cooperation with USAID programs, suggested that USAID invest in a rubber plantation in the island of Basilan, a former terrorist safehaven, to solidify peace and prosperity. (Note: USAID has supported and continues to support a broad range of successful activities aimed at developing the agri-business sector in Mindanao, primarily through work with producer and marketing associations. Basilan has benefited from support in this area.)

¶4. Executive Secretary Ermita commended the Ambassador's initiative in reaching out to the Muslim interns and young professionals. He noted that older generations had already chosen a point of view, but future leaders were more flexible.

COMMENT

¶5. The diversity of the guests made the Iftar dinner a success - leaders of varying ages from Muslim, Christian, and Jewish community attended. The setting also provided an opportunity to display pictures of USG assistance projects, take an informal poll on feelings the success of aid, and ask about ideas for future projects.

